Mikhail Semiryaga

The Winter War

Looking Back After Fifty Years

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Our destinies have been closely interwoven by history, and neither of our countries has been ungrateful for this. We have contributed to the treasury of history a unique example of equitable relations, mutual respect and trust. This has come about despite the fact that the past has not always been smooth and that at times there has even been fierce enmity.

From Mikhail Gorbachev's speech during his visit to Finland, October 26, 1989.

ON THE EVE

On November 29, 1939, the familiar voice of the Chairman of the USSR Council of People's Commissars, Vyacheslav Molotov, announced over the Moscow radio that the hostile policy of the government of Finland "compels us to take immediate steps to ensure the security of the Soviet Union." At first light the next day the Soviet troops attacked the Finnish forces along the entire Soviet-Finnish border from the Baltic to the Barents Sea. Kronstadt's coastal artillery fired on Finnish territory. Planes based at airfields that had just been built in Estonia bombed several Finnish cities, including Helsinki.

Thus began the Soviet-Finnish war.

The passions aroused by this war have not been quelled even today, more than half a century after the event. Attempts were and still are being made both abroad and in the Soviet Union to replace the true and complete picture of the conflict with deliberations that this or that side alone was to blame. Let us follow the good advice of Mark Twain who recommended that one should establish facts before starting to distort them.

The development of Finland's relations with the Soviet Union was very complicated and contradictory for almost two decades after the former became an independent state.* Although in 1920 Finland signed the Yuryev Peace Treaty with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Re-

*After the October 1917 Revolution in Russia the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, acting at the request of the Finnish government, passed on December 22, 1917, a Decree on the State Independence of Finland (This and the following notes are by the editor).

public (RSFSR) and in 1932 the Treaty of Non-Aggression and Peaceful Settlement of Conflicts with the USSR, which was prolonged two years later until December 31, 1945, there still remained some mutual mistrust between the two states. Finland, who feared possible great-power interference by Stalin, whose dictatorial actions were often unpredictable, sought to secure the support of other countries in possible emergency situations. It zealously adhered to its image as the "outpost of the West" and avoided the bilateral settlement of thorny problems with its Eastern neighbour.

The Soviet leadership also had reasons to be worried by Finland's actions and attitude. It was not so much the provocative claims to Soviet territory and the warlike activity of Skyddskar* men, because Finland itself was obviously unable to attack the Soviet Union; but the Soviet leadership did not rule out the possibility that some Western power could use Finland's territory for aggressive purposes even without the latter's consent. Soviet-Finnish relations were certainly clouded by Finland's unilateral rapprochement with Western countries, particularly Germany.

These circumstances prompted the Soviet government to take into account the possibility of a military conflict with Finland ever since the spring of 1936, when the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR passed a decision to resettle the civilian population (3,400 peasant holdings) from the Karelian Isthmus where proving grounds and other military facilities were to be built. During 1938 the Soviet General Staff raised at least three times the question of transferring a large forest area on the Karelian Isthmus to the military authorities for military construction. On September 13, 1939, Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, the People's Commissar for Defence, specially approached Molotov, Chairman of the Economic Council under the USSR Council of People's Commissars, and proposed that this work be stepped up. Diplomatic measures were taken at the same time in order to prevent

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*Skyddskar was a reactionary paramilitary organization in Finland (1917-1944).

military clashes. In February 1937 Rudolf Holsti, Finland's Foreign Minister, made the first visit to Moscow since Finland acquired independence. A report about his talks with the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov pointed to "the possibility of the unhindered development and strengthening of neighbourly relations between both states within the framework of the existing Soviet-Finnish agreements, for which both governments strive and will continue to strive." But when Voroshilov put to Holsti the question of Finland's position if its territory was used by a third country for anti-Soviet purposes he received no reply.

In early 1938 the Soviet authorities learned about Finland's plans to remilitarize the Aaland Islands in violation of its obligations under the 1921 international convention*, which directly affected the interests of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Moscow found it expedient in April 1938 to propose to the government of Finland confidentially through the Soviet embassy in Helsinki official negotiations on the joint working out of measures for strengthening the security of the maritime and ground approaches to Leningrad and Finland's frontiers.

The Soviet side, which was represented on behalf of the government by the embassy's second secretary, Boris Yartsev, maintained that the main danger for the USSR came at that time from Germany, whose troops could land on Finland's territory and advance towards Leningrad. Moscow believed that, should Finnish troops resist the aggressor, the Red Army could come to their aid on the condition that it would leave Finnish territory as soon as the war ended. Nor did the Soviet government exclude the threat of a pro-German coup d'état in Finland, which could complicate the general situation even further.

Acting on the instructions of the Soviet government, Yartsev proposed the conclusion of a military agreement which would come into force only in the case of direct aggression by the Germans. But Helsinki rejected any version of it which envisaged the presence of Soviet troops

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*The convention on the demilitarization and neutralization of the Aaland Islands.

on Finland's territory. The Soviet side then proposed that the Finnish government should give assurances in writing that it would put up resistance to the Wehrmacht, agree to accept Soviet armaments and also allow the Soviet navy to operate near Finland's shores, something which would require the construction of naval and air bases on Sursaari (Hogland) Island.

The talks, which lasted for several months, proved in the end to be fruitless. Finland rejected the Soviet proposals since by adopting them, it claimed, it would be violating "its right to self-determination".

Meanwhile the situation in Europe deteriorated sharply. The Munich agreement was concluded in September 1938, as a result of which Germany occupied the whole of Bohemia and openly embarked on its armed expansionist policies. Many countries were threatened with the prospect of war. In October 1938, straight after Munich, the Soviet government made a new, more precise proposal, according to which Finland was to build a base of its own on Sursaari, but in the event of aggression, which it was unable to repel by itself, the Soviet Union would give it assistance. However, this proposal was also turned down by Helsinki.

But Moscow kept offering more new proposals. In early March 1939 the following measures were proposed to the government of Finland: the USSR would guarantee Finland's inviolability, offer it necessary help against possible aggression and support its request for a revision of the status of the Aaland Islands. But Finland, by way of reciprocal measures, would have to resist any aggression and assist the Soviet Union in strengthening Leningrad's security; to this end it would lease Sursaari and several other small islands in the Gulf of Finland to the Soviet Union for 30 years, on which only observation posts, not bases, would be built. Finland showed no interest in this idea either, referring again to its neutrality, and the talks were interrupted once again.

What other measures could be taken by the Soviet Union and Finland in what seemed a hopeless situation in order at last to lead the negotiations out of this impasse? The best way seemed to be for the Soviet Union to refrain

from making demands which manifestly affected Finland's sovereignty and persistently to seek other solutions of a political nature.

Soon after Boris Shtein* arrived in Helsinki to conduct unofficial talks on the instructions of the Soviet government. He brought a Soviet proposal, new in principle, according to which Finland was to cede to the Soviet Union some territory on the Karelian Isthmus and receive in exchange a larger piece of Soviet territory and compensation for the cost of resettling Finnish citizens from the ceded area. The Finnish side replied in the negative on the same grounds that consent to the proposal would infringe Finland's sovereignty and neutrality.

This insistence of the Soviet leadership caused a natural reaction in Helsinki: Finland began to take defensive steps in response to the dangerous measures of a military nature taken by the Soviet Union. Finland intensified its military contacts with Great Britain, Sweden and Germany; top-ranking military representatives of these countries became frequent guests in Helsinki. The Finns were given assistance in improving the line of fortifications along the border with the Soviet Union, known as the "Mannerheim Line".

The Soviet Union for its part also began military preparations. In early March 1939 Voroshilov ordered Army Commander 2nd Rank Kirill Meretskov, the newly appointed commander of the Leningrad Military District, to ascertain the readiness of the troops "in case of a military conflict with Finland". Voroshilov mentioned in his order the relevant instructions from Stalin.

Having studied the situation on the spot, Meretskov drew the conclusion that the Finnish troops had from the very beginning of their preparations planned an offensive mission on the Karelian Isthmus the aim of which was to wear down the Soviet forces and then strike at Leningrad. One gets the impression that the top Soviet political and military leaders did not at the time have a clear picture of Finland's position. While Stalin and Molotov kept saying that they were worried not so much by Finland itself but

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*In 1932-1934 Shtein was the Soviet Ambassador to Finland.

by the possibility of its being used by Western powers as an anti-Soviet bridgehead, Meretskov assessed the situation in a more straightforward and harsh manner. That assessment ruled out a search for political ways of solving the problem, as was confirmed by the subsequent decisions of the Soviet leadership.

Major construction work was embarked on in the spring and summer of 1939 in the Leningrad Military District, steps were taken to train personnel in simulated combat conditions and the organization of the frontier troops was improved. This naturally could not go unnoticed by the Finns and caused them great anxiety.

Meretskov recalled that late in June 1939 he was present at Stalin's talk with Otto Kuusinen, a prominent figure of the Finnish and international communist movement, during which the situation in Finland and various possible plans of action for the Soviet Union were discussed. Stalin described the situation in Finland and at the Soviet-Finnish border as alarming, even though he had made his own contribution to its aggravation. On Stalin's proposal the Chief Military Council instructed Meretskov to plan the operations of his district's troops in the event of a military attack. The plan was examined in Moscow and approved in the second half of July 1939. The task of the Soviet troops officially consisted of containing the enemy forces and then striking a "decisive counterblow".

The statement made by Molotov at the Sixth Session of the USSR Supreme Soviet on March 29, 1940, to the effect that "Finland and above all the Karelian Isthmus already constituted by 1939 a ready military bridgehead for an attack on the Soviet Union, particularly Leningrad, by third powers" was not confirmed by reliable facts. If "third powers" meant Germany, it must be said that at that time, in 1939, it neither planned nor was prepared for a serious military conflict with the Soviet Union. Molotov said in the same speech that "the Soviet Union did not want to be an accomplice of Britain and France in conducting an imperialist policy against Germany". It follows then that these "third powers" could only be Britain and France. But neither London nor Paris had any such plans at that time. They were even less able to make use of this "bridgehead"

in Finland later on when they were engaged in war in Western Europe.

Information given by the command of the Soviet border troops showed that the situation at the Soviet-Finnish border in the first half of 1939 was, though tense at times, relatively calm in general. There were isolated crossings of the border, but no major provocations were recorded, let alone incidents involving the use of arms.

Nevertheless, the Soviet government continued to strengthen its frontier forces in the northwest. In March 1939 the Leningrad district of the frontier forces of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs was divided into the Murmansk, Karelian and Leningrad districts. By the beginning of the hostilities their personnel was increased to an amount 27-29 per cent in excess of the usual full quota. The frontier troops had actually begun to prepare for hostilities since October 10, i.e. prior to the beginning of the last negotiations between the delegations of the two sides.* On October 25 the Sestroretsk frontier detachment received an order mentioning a possible crossing of the border, which did not, however, mention the day or hour of the operation.

The Soviet-German Non-Aggression Treaty, supplemented by a secret protocol, was signed in Moscow on August 23, 1939. This protocol played a decisive role in the conflict with Finland. It stated that in the event of territorial and political changes in areas belonging to Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Northern border of Lithuania would be considered as the boundary between the spheres of influence of the USSR and Germany. This meant that Finland's territorial and political changes were planned beforehand in favour of the Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership managed to secure its "rights" in the Baltic region peacefully by concluding bilateral treaties with the Baltic countries. As regards Finland, however, which declared its complete neutrality in early September 1939 and objected to plans to set up Soviet military bases on its territory, Stalin resorted to armed force. Obviously, there might have been no Soviet

*The third round of the negotiations began on October 12, 1939.

military bases in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and there might have been no Soviet-Finnish war if it were not for Germany's prior consent to take no interest in the Baltic region.

The Second World War, which began on September 1, 1939, radically changed the situation in Europe, including Soviet-Finnish relations. The Western powers on whose assistance Finland was counting were busy with the war, leaving the Soviet Union unhindered in its decisions and actions.

The commander of the Leningrad Military District was ordered to prepare promptly a plan of "cover and counterblow" and to intensify secretly the preparation of troops and military construction. It was intended to deliver a "counterblow" within the shortest possible time. (Strangely, these actions were called a "counterblow", for no one seriously expected the danger of a "blow" from the Finnish side.) The opinion of Army Commander 1st Rank Boris Shaposhnikov, Chief of the General Staff, that such a "counterblow" could potentially require great effort and an arduous war, was simply ignored.

Even during the hostilities in Poland, Voroshilov and Shaposhnikov, in their directives of September 11 and 14, 1939, ordered the Military Council of the Leningrad Military District to concentrate troops for a possible war with Finland. Air forces were deployed at airfields in combat readiness. At the same time the commander of the Leningrad Military District assumed operational command of the 7th Army formed from the main forces of that district. The Leningrad Military District also included the newly formed Murmansk task force, which was renamed the 14th Army on November 15.

These preparations, which were immediately heard about in Helsinki, and the extreme nervous strain which they caused, inevitably led to the further aggravation of the situation, regardless of the objectives of the preparations.

To do justice to both sides it should be said that they did not lose hope of a political settlement of the dispute, as was shown by the decision to renew the third round of their negotiations on October 12, 1939. The head of the

Finnish delegation was Juho Paasikivi, an experienced diplomat whom the Finnish government did not, however, authorize to sign any agreements with the USSR. The Soviet delegation was led by Molotov, but Stalin also took part in its work. At the second stage of the talks Väinö Tanner, a right-wing Social-Democrat and the Minister of Finance, was included in the Finnish delegation. It was rumoured in Helsinki that Tanner had got acquainted with Stalin in Finland before the 1917 revolution and once even done him a financial service, which, it was believed, might help to conclude the negotiations successfully.

These talks were conducted, unlike the previous ones, in conditions of war, the Second World War having already begun. This ought to have evoked in the negotiating partners a special responsibility for the security of their countries. During the course of these talks Stalin proposed the signing of a mutual assistance pact along the lines of the treaties concluded in late September and early October with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. One of the items of those documents provided for the deployment of a contingent of Soviet troops and the setting up of military bases on the territories of those countries. Finland, fearing that such bases would also appear on its territory, rejected the proposal on the grounds that such a pact would run counter to its policy of neutrality. The Soviet government then came up with a new proposal: to move back the border several dozen miles on the Karelian Isthmus and to hand over to the Soviet Union several islands in the Gulf of Finland, as well as part of the Rybachi and Sredni peninsulas in the Barents Sea, in exchange for some territory in Soviet Karelia, which was twice as large but was not equal in quality and importance. It was further proposed that Finland should lease for 30 years, sell or hand over in an exchange agreement the Hanko Peninsula to the Soviet Union for the construction of a Soviet naval base there. This last proposal was a source of particular anxiety to the Finns.

That is why Paasikivi remarked at a meeting of both delegations that territorial questions should be decided only by the Finnish Diet, where a positive decision required a two-thirds majority of votes. Stalin's reaction to

this was: "You will get more than two-thirds plus our votes as well." The Finnish side regarded these words as an undisguised threat to use force should the Diet disagree.

Still Paasikivi said in his reply of October 31 that, in view of the international situation and its absolute neutrality, Finland could not cede the Hanko Peninsula or any of the islands, but was ready to make other major concessions. This made it possible to achieve some progress and come to terms. But Tanner did everything possible to reduce support for Paasikivi's view in Helsinki, and the Finnish government declined the Soviet proposal.

A detailed analysis of Soviet-Finnish relations at that stage was made publicly for the first time by Molotov at a session of the USSR Supreme Soviet on October 31, 1939, while negotiations were still going on. He described them as relations of a special kind because Finland was subject to external influences, which made the Soviet Union apprehensive about its security as a whole and that of Leningrad in particular. Molotov stated that the questions negotiated with Finland were the same as those negotiated with Estonia. He rejected the allegations of the foreign press that the Soviet Union was demanding the town of Viipuri (Vyborg) and a territory north of Lake Ladoga. Molotov then recounted the course of the negotiations with the Finnish delegation, noting that the Soviet Union had proposed to Finland "to conclude a Soviet-Finnish mutual assistance pact along the lines of our mutual assistance pacts with other Baltic states."

Molotov expressed readiness to meet Finland's demands half-way and urged it not to succumb to anti-Soviet pressure and instigations from the outside. In this connection he criticized the statement made by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his letter to Mikhail Kalinin, in which Roosevelt expressed the hope that friendly and peaceful relations between the USSR and Finland would be maintained and developed. Molotov called the statement interference in internal affairs and recommended that the American President instead grant freedom and independence to the Philippines and Cuba.

The newspaper *Pravda* made its "contribution" to the

heightening of tension between the Soviet Union and Finland when it published on November 3, 1939, the day of the arrival in Moscow of the Finnish delegation for the continuation of the talks, an article headed "Concerning the Soviet-Finnish Negotiations", with the subheading: "Finland's Foreign Minister Calls for War with the USSR". What were the grounds for making this accusation against Finnish Foreign Minister Eljas Erkko? Here is the text of his comment on Molotov's speech at the session of the USSR Supreme Soviet:

"The demands of the USSR allegedly involve the moving of the border from Leningrad by several kilometres, but from Finland's point of view this is Russian imperialism. . . . There is a limit to everything. Finland cannot agree to the Soviet Union's proposal and will defend its territory, inviolability and independence by every available means." *Pravda* further claimed that "in conclusion, Erkko directly threatened the Soviet Union, declaring that he knew what forces Finland could rely upon to ensure its neutrality and freedom if its security was threatened."

One would be hard put, even by a stretch of imagination, to detect a call for war against the Soviet Union in the words of the Finnish Foreign Minister. The same cannot be said for the concluding paragraph of the *Pravda* article, which actually contained an irresponsible threat to Finland. It was as follows: "Our answer is simple and clear. The political gamblers with all their games can go to hell. We shall follow our own path and demolish each and every obstacle on the way to our goal."

As was to be expected, the new round of Soviet-Finnish talks was again interrupted on November 13, since the possibility of conducting them in a normal atmosphere was out of the question when hundreds of trainloads with troops and combat equipment from various military districts were heading for Leningrad. It was then that Stalin spoke the ominous words: "We shall have to fight Finland."

During the last days of November 1939 the Soviet government proposed, in what amounted to an ultimatum, that the government of Finland withdraw its troops unilaterally 20-25 kilometres from the border. There naturally

followed a counter-proposal from the Finnish side for Soviet troops also to withdraw to the same distance, since the Finns had no less grounds to mistrust Stalin than he had to mistrust them. Thus the total distance between the withdrawn Finnish and Soviet troops would be doubled. Stalin could be reminded with good reason that the moving of the border from Leningrad by 25 kilometres would mean bringing it closer to Helsinki by the same distance.

Instead of accepting this sensible proposal of the Finns as the first step towards possible new compromises, the Soviet government described it as "a reflection of the deep-seated enmity of the government of Finland towards the Soviet Union" and stated that the Finnish proposal for Soviet troops to be withdrawn to Leningrad's outskirts was absurd.

After the disruption of negotiations the Soviet Union stepped up its military preparations. Soviet troops continued to concentrate on the Karelian Isthmus, and combat-ready planes kept arriving at airfields. The press began to publish expressly negative articles on Finland more and more frequently.

Finland took defensive measures. It increased the number of its divisions on the Karelian Isthmus from two or three to seven and began to evacuate its population not only from the frontier areas but also from Helsinki and other major cities. Intensive work was done to modernize the Mannerheim Line, as well as highways and airfields. A call-up was declared for the regular army and the Skyddskar paramilitary organization. Marshal Mannerheim was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish armed forces.

Thus an analysis of the Soviet-Finnish negotiations held between February 1937 and the end of November 1939 leads to the conclusion that the Soviet proposals aimed at ensuring the security of Leningrad (as seen by Stalin, Molotov and Voroshilov) ran counter to the interests of sovereign and neutral Finland (as seen by that country's leaders). So the two sides were drawing near to a dangerous boundary beyond which lay war. They watched each other down the barrels of their rifles, and armed provocations, which had been occurring on the

border, now could serve as a very suitable pretext for the Soviet side to demonstrate its strength.

One such provocation, which served as a "Northern Sarajevo" in the Soviet-Finnish war, was an armed incident at the Soviet frontier village of Mainila. According to the Soviet version stated in Meretskov's report, the headquarters of the Leningrad Military District was informed on November 26, 1939, about the shelling by Finnish artillery of a Soviet unit stationed north of Mainila. Four Red Army soldiers and commanders had been killed and nine wounded. Colonel Tikhomirov of the military district's staff was sent to investigate the circumstances which had led to the incident.

The Soviet government sent a note of protest to Finland, demanding an immediate end to the hostilities and the withdrawal of Finnish troops to a distance of 25 kilometres from the state border.

The reply from the Finnish government denied the fact that an attack had been made by Finnish troops. In its note the Finnish government suggested, after a unilateral investigation, that "it was the case of an accident which occurred during training exercises on the Soviet side." The important point is that the Finnish note proposed "a joint investigation of the incident in accordance with the convention relating to border agents, concluded on September 24, 1928 and expressed readiness "to begin negotiations on the mutual withdrawal of troops to a certain distance from the border."

It would seem that this reasonable proposal could have been accepted and the whole matter thus settled. But the next statement from the Soviet government, dated November 28, 1939, qualified the Finnish note as unacceptable. The Soviet note in effect refused joint investigation of the incident, accused the Finnish side of violating the non-aggression pact and stated that the Soviet side "considered itself free of the obligations undertaken under the non-aggression pact." In the evening of November 29 the Soviet Union's political and economic representatives were recalled from Helsinki.

The investigation of such incidents, carried out by skilled provocateurs, is certainly a very difficult job. And

yet it must be done, if not straight after the event then at least half a century later. There is no reason to attach to the provocation some importance which it does not have and claim that it was precisely this which caused the armed clash between the two countries. The war broke out as a result of a crisis in relations between the USSR and Finland developing for a number of years and the short-sighted actions of statesmen who regarded the use of armed force as the only way of settling thorny international issues. But it was the Soviet government who attached special significance to the Mainila incident. It was Molotov who called it in his radio speech on November 29, 1939, a manifestation of the "undisguised desire" of the Finnish side "to continue threatening Leningrad with its troops." He no longer referred to the shelling of a Soviet frontier post north of the village of Mainila, located only 800 metres from the border, but spoke of something purely fictional—the "shelling of our military units near Leningrad, which caused heavy casualties in Red Army units." He referred next to the proposal of the Finnish side to investigate jointly the provocation in Mainila as an "impudent denial of facts and a mockery of the losses we have sustained."

In the current absence of archive documents about the Mainila incident, we would still like to consider certain points and make certain conjectures. Remarkably, the Soviet propaganda emphasized that shells had been fired on regular Soviet troops and that their victims had been servicemen from the forces in the field. But no field forces could have been deployed in the Mainila area so close to the border. Those stationed there were frontier guards subordinated to Beria's department. Could this fact throw some light on the nature of the shelling?

Rather suspicious is the fact that the names of the Red Army soldiers and junior commanders that were killed are not known to this day. Nor were the results of the examination made by Colonel Tikhomirov published in the press. Perhaps he was not even allowed to inquire into this delicate affair? It would also be interesting to read the reminiscences of eye-witnesses to that incident. Unfortunately, however, they have not been published either.

Finally, it is high time we established the total number of casualties from the incident. Meretskov spoke of four men killed and nine wounded, while a book on the history of the frontier troops mentions three men killed and seven wounded.

The general impression is that the incident in Mainila was staged by people who needed it for attaining their nefarious ends. It evidently benefited only the Soviet side so that it would have a pretext for denouncing the non-aggression treaty with Finland, after which there remained just one step to war.

The incident was followed by an infuriated message from the Soviet government, the denunciation of the non-aggression treaty, the recall of Soviet diplomatic and economic representatives and, finally, Molotov's speech over the radio. The troops which had long been ready for a "counterblow" went into action at 8 a.m. on November 30, 1939. Such was the prompt operation of a mechanism known as "rapid response" in modern military-political language.

According to one maxim, many people do not stop to think only because it does not occur to them to do so. Perhaps, the Soviet leaders also did not stop to think of the consequences simply because it never occurred to them that the Finns would dare to resist.

The breach of the Finnish border by a large Soviet force and its advance into the country, which was not resisted for some time by any Finnish troops (except for a few frontier guards), amounted in fact to an "undeclared war". On the same day the Finnish President, Kijosti Kallio, made this statement: "Finland has declared a state of war in order to maintain the country's defence."

This act of the Soviet government constituted a violation of international law, aggravated by circumstances which made the responsibility of the attacking side greater. The illegitimate actions of the Soviet leadership were its violation of the Soviet-Finnish Peace Treaty of 1920, the Non-Aggression Treaty of 1932, prolonged in 1934, and also of the London Convention for the Definition of Aggression (the so-called Litvinov Treaty), which the Soviet Union signed with its neighbours in August 1933 and

to which Finland acceded in 1934. The last document defined "aggression" and clearly stated that no considerations of a political, military, economic or any other nature could be used to motivate or justify a threat, blockade or attack on another participant state.

Of course, the Soviet government considered it inconceivable that Finland itself could commit aggressive acts against its mighty neighbour. It was only afraid that Finland's territory could be used by third countries for anti-Soviet purposes. But since no provision to that effect had been made in the above mentioned documents, the contracting parties did not recognize its possibility and had therefore to abide by the letter and spirit of the documents.

At the same time this action amounted to an infringement of the internal law, since the 1936 Constitution of the USSR, which was far from perfect in legal terms, allowed, however, the possibility of declaration by the USSR Supreme Soviet only of "a state of war", and not of "war" itself. Besides, "a state of war" could be declared only in two cases: in the event of an armed attack on the Soviet Union or of the need to fulfil international legal obligations concerning mutual defence against aggression. There was nothing of the kind in this case. The war started against Finland by the Soviet government should be qualified as an illegal act of a great power against a small neighbouring country.

THE WAR

What aims did the Soviet government pursue when it began the war against Finland?

Some official Soviet statements made on the eve and at the beginning of the war pointed to a very clear objective—the security of Leningrad—which could be ensured by shifting the border by 20-25 kilometres. But why did the Soviet leadership and especially top military commanders regard an additional distance of 25 kilometres as being so essential for safeguarding Leningrad? Because, it was claimed (and vigorously propagandized in the press), that the then distance from the border to Leningrad (32 kilometres) made it possible for Finnish artillery to shell Leningrad. But this claim was entirely groundless because the Finnish army did not have guns of a calibre necessary for such an operation. In fact its armaments consisted mainly of weapons and equipment dating back to the time of the old Russian army. Large-calibre artillery included 105-mm German field guns put into service in 1930 and anti-aircraft guns. Even if they had been positioned right on the border (which was, of course, ruled out) they could have hit targets located at only half the distance to Leningrad.

The very first operational order to the troops of the Leningrad Military District, signed by its commander, Kirill Meretskov, and Andrei Zhdanov, member of the Military Council, showed that the objectives of the planned operation went far beyond the limits of ensuring the security of Leningrad. The order called not only for "crossing the border and routing the Finnish troops", but

also for liberating "the Finnish people from the yoke of landowners and capitalists." It is hardly likely that this political objective was formulated by the commanders of the Leningrad Military District without the proper agreement of the country's political leadership.

In the next few days the idea of "ensuring Leningrad's security" seemed to be altogether forgotten by Soviet propaganda, especially for the army in the field, and was replaced by the emphasis on the "liberating mission" of the Red Army in Finland. Soviet newspapers carried numerous accounts of mass meetings of working people held "in support of decisive action against the White Finns"* under such headings as: "Retaliate with a Triple Blow!", "Repel the Presumptuous Robbers!", "Down with the Provokers of War!", "Destroy the Vicious Gang!", "Boundless Impudence!", etc., etc. On the eve and in the first days of the war Vasili Lebedev-Kumach, a well-known poet of that time, published several verses in the newspaper *Izvestia*, "angrily condemning the Finnish warmongers" in very strong language.

The propaganda clichés used at that time to stoke up passions included such expressions as "White Finn bandits", "Finnish White Guard scum", "White Finland", etc. The propaganda campaign launched in the USSR was rather primitive since it was based on the unrealistic premise that the working people of Finland, supported by the Red Army, were ready to overthrow "the power of capitalists and landowners".

"The plan of operations for routing the land and sea forces of the Finnish Army" was drafted by the staff of the Leningrad Military District and signed by Kirill Meretskov and his Chief of Staff Nikandr Chibisov on October 29, 1939, while negotiations were still going on.

The main forces of the district on the Karelian Isthmus (nine divisions) were united in the 7th Army under Army Commander 2nd Rank Vsevolod Yakovlev. The army's

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*The adjective "white" before the word "Finns" (and also "Poles") had no meaning beyond adding a negative emotional colouring to the following noun (by analogy with the Russian "White Guards", enemies of the Revolution of October 1917). The combination was concocted in order to stir up Soviet people's hatred against the Finns.

objective, set by order of the People's Commissar of Defence on November 17, 1939, was to capture the fortified area on the Karelian Isthmus within 8-10 days press, the offensive and rout the Finnish army grouping in the area of Sortavala-Viipuri (Vyborg). After performing this task the Soviet troops ought to have been ready, if required, to continue the offensive onto Helsinki. But the Finnish capital was not the final target, as was indicated by a directive saying that the Swedish and Norwegian borders should not be crossed when they were reached and that no provocations should be allowed. Swedish and Norwegian servicemen at the frontier should be greeted with a salute.

This is how Nikita Khrushchev* described the prevailing mood in the Kremlin on the eve and at the beginning of the war with Finland:

"There was an opinion that Finland should be confronted with an ultimatum of a territorial nature, which it had already rejected at the negotiations, and that hostilities would begin if it disagreed. This was Stalin's opinion. I did not, of course, contradict Stalin then. I also believed that this was how it should be. It would be enough to speak out resolutely, and if there was no response it would be enough just to fire a cannon to make the Finns raise their hands and agree to our demands. . .

"Stalin then said: 'Okay then, the operation will begin today'.

"We sat for quite a long time because the hour had already been set. Stalin was confident, and we also believed, that there would be no war, that the Finns would accept our proposals and we would thus attain our aim without war. The aim was to safeguard our territory from attack from the North.

"Suddenly there was a phone call to say that we had fired a shot. The Finns replied with artillery fire. The war had actually begun. I say this because one hears a different version: that the Finns fired first and we were forced to retaliate. Did we have the legal and moral right to take

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*He was at that time the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukraine.

such a step? We had no legal right, of course. But the desire to safeguard ourselves and to come to terms with the neighbour morally justified us in our own eyes."

On the first day of the war the Soviet air force bombed military targets in the Helsinki area, but several bombs were also dropped in the centre of the city because of navigational errors. This resulted in damage to buildings and casualties. It is true that on December 3 the Red Army Command categorically prohibited air raids on targets deep in Finland's rear. It was only a month later, when the situation at the front became unfavourable for the Red Army, that Voroshilov, Stalin and Shaposhnikov signed an order which said: "Bomber command shall strike systematic and powerful blows at targets deep in the enemy's rear: i.e., administrative and military industrial targets, railway bridges, railway junctions, ports and transport ships of the enemy."

The very first days of the war revealed inefficiency in the control of the fighting troops. The existing troop control system was abolished, and from December 9 the immediate command of the armies in the field and of the Baltic and Northern Fleets was taken over by the newly established General Headquarters of the Red Army. It consisted of the People's Commissar of Defence, Kliment Voroshilov (Commander-in-Chief), Nikolai Kuznetsov (People's Commissar of the Navy), Boris Shaposhnikov (the Chief of the General Staff) and Stalin himself. Meretskov was appointed commander of the 7th Army.

During December heavy fighting was waged all along the front. But substantial success was achieved only in the offensive zone of the 14th Army. Its troops, supported by ships of the Northern Fleet, captured the Finnish sections of Rybachi and Sredni peninsulas and the town of Petsamo. These troops advanced a total of 150-200 kilometres. But the armies operating in central Karelia were able to advance by only 35-80 kilometres. As a result of fierce fighting the troops of the 7th Army in action on the Karelian Isthmus closely approached the main zone of the Mannerheim Line. The line's bunkers were pounded with the shells of 203-280-mm guns of the GHQ reserve, and

the experimental heavy tank KV was used for the first time in attacks on the town of Summa, but the Finns' defence could not be broken on the run.

Khrushchev had this to say about Stalin's reaction to the setbacks suffered by our troops during the first period of the war:

"Stalin was furious. The military explained that they were not aware of the existence of the Finnish fortifications on the Karelian Isthmus, which were known as the Mannerheim Line, and put the blame on the intelligence service.*

"All this culminated in the main accusation against Voroshilov, since he was the People's Commissar of Defence. There was in fact no one else who could be blamed for military defeat. Voroshilov was to blame because he had failed to consider everything properly.

"Our navy was in action against the Finnish navy. It seemed that the balance of forces could not be in favour of the Finns, but all the same our navy performed poorly. I remember a report made to Stalin that our sailors had mistaken a Swedish ship for a Finnish one. The submarine attempted to sink it but failed. The Germans, who observed this, mockingly offered to help: 'Why are you doing so badly? You cannot even sink a ship! Perhaps, you need assistance?. . . '

"There was growing anxiety in the country. The aura of invincibility of our army was fading. We sang in more than one song of that time: 'Should the war strike tomorrow we are ready to march today.' But if we could not get the better of the Finns how would we cope with a much stronger probable enemy?

"Thus the Finnish war exposed our immense difficulties and our inability to organize the conduct of warfare."

The setbacks suffered by Soviet troops at the first stage of the war stemmed above all from the flaws in the planning of the war itself, which envisaged lightning operations and was based on the obvious overestimation of

*Here it is necessary to correct Khrushchev, because the existence of the Mannerheim Line was mentioned in Soviet notes and in negotiations long before the beginning of the conflict as one factor in the threat to Leningrad.

the potential of Soviet troops and underestimation of the enemy's combat capability. Hence the command was not prepared for hostilities in conditions of severe winter, and the troops were not sufficiently provided with warm clothing and necessary equipment. There was a shortage of mortars, submachine guns and other modern weapons. There was quite insufficient interaction between the services, especially between ground and air forces.

In his letter to Stalin and Molotov of December 21, 1939, Voroshilov wrote about the outrageous flaws revealed in the 7th Army, which was operating in the main thrust of the attack. He pointed out that the roads were jammed and that there was, instead of infantry as an organized force at the front, an uncontrollable mass of people, who would scatter after the first shots were fired and disappeared into the marshes and forests. The infantry suffered heavy losses from stray bullets.

Voroshilov pointed out further that the commanders and political instructors had been hoping for a walkover in Finland (similar to the Polish operation). Therefore many regiments joined combat equipped with few machine guns, while others awaited a "breakthrough" after which they would be able to march in triumph to Viipuri. Meretskov had no control over the chaotic situation. He was ignorant of the real state of affairs at the front and believed that everything was going well. Voroshilov reported that he had warned Zhdanov that he should not trust Meretskov's chatter and be more demanding of the commanders and of the army commander in particular. Since the Military Council of the 7th Army did nothing to put things right, Meretskov was warned on behalf of the General Headquarters that, unless he restored order among the troops, he would be dismissed and put on trial.

Not infrequently small groups of Finns raided the rear of our forces and inflicted losses on us by sudden strikes. This happened, in particular, with the 70th and 138th divisions of the 7th Army. They were taken unawares on the night of December 22 by a group of Finnish scouts because of the lack of basic discipline, proper reconnaissance and firm control, and the inadequate use of artillery. The General Headquarters reprimanded Meretskov and

the whole of the army's Military Council for the inefficient command and coordination of its units and for the lack of discipline in the rear echelons.

It is therefore natural that commanders fighting at the front wrote to Voroshilov, expressing their resentment at the poor organization of combat activity and the lack of discipline among the troops. For instance, Colonel Rayevsky, a cavalryman who had taken part in the Civil War and was appointed in late December 1939 as commander of an infantry regiment of the 8th Army, wrote to Voroshilov that many young commanders, just out of military school, were dying in vain because of lack of experience. He objected to the use of female medical personnel in the rigorous winter conditions of the front. The Colonel reported cases of panic in our troops and the shortage of submachine guns, of which the Finns had enough.

Rayevsky wrote in conclusion: "I think with shame of the fact that White Finn bandits have **surrounded** or attempted to surround our valiant Red Army or, more exactly, some of its small and even large units. It is painful even to think that a mere handful of White Finn gangs can surround (sometimes even successfully) Red Army troops and cause considerable problems, using our own tactics."

Meretskov later recalled that Stalin was extremely displeased with the slow advance of the Soviet troops. He rebuked the army commander, pointing out that the unfavourable course of the war against Finland was having a negative effect on "our foreign policy, because the whole world is looking at us these days." He demanded a fundamental change in the course of the hostilities.

In late December 1939 the Chief Military Council decided to suspend the current offensive and plan an entirely new one. Its details were thoroughly examined at a special meeting of the Politburo of the Party's Central Committee held during the first days of January 1940. At that time the North-Western Front was formed on the Karelian Isthmus where considerable reinforcements began to arrive, mostly from the Western and Kiev special military districts. They were reinforced, above all, by very heavy artillery, tanks and aviation. In view of the previous experience, the troops were engaged in intensive practical

training during January for breaking through the enemy's fortifications.

Army Commander 1st Rank Semyon Timoshenko was appointed commander of the Front. The total strength of the army in the field, deployed between the Barents and Baltic seas, was up to 40 divisions numbering 957,675 officers and men (as of February 1, 1940). This meant that our superiority over the enemy was more than 2:1 in infantry, nearly 3:1 in artillery and absolute in both tanks and aviation.

The new offensive was being prepared quite quickly because its delay could result in the interference by Britain and France in the war on Finland's side, which could create new difficulties for the Soviet Union and extend the war front.

On February 3, 1940, the Military Council at the Front finally endorsed the plan of the operation. On February 11, 1940, the Front's troops went onto the offensive and broke the main zone of the Mannerheim Line. Mobile (tank) groups were sent into the breach to exploit the success. The troops of the 7th Army regrouped and resumed the offensive on February 28, forcing the enemy to retreat all along the front. They crossed the ice-bound Vyborg Bay and cut the Vyborg-Helsinki highway, thus completing the penetration of the Mannerheim Line.

At this stage of the war the hostilities were conducted in the extremely tough conditions of an unusually severe winter when the temperature was sometimes down to minus 40-45C°. The snow, up to two metres thick, prevented the advance of troops and especially of vehicles off the road. Many of the Soviet soldiers, especially those who came from the country's southern regions, were not prepared for combat on skis in wooded lakeland areas.

The Finnish troops put up stiff resistance. They had built a reliable system of fortifications and defended their weapon emplacements down to the last man. Finnish snipers picked off many careless individual Soviet soldiers and also small groups. The Finns used various fighting methods and scout groups on skis penetrated far behind the Soviet lines. Participants in the war acknowledged that as an individual fighter the Finnish soldier was superior

to the Soviet soldier.

The morale of the Finnish troops was high during the first period of the war when there was still hope that the Soviet forces would cease their offensive. The Finnish officers and men were supported by the local population and were convinced that they were fighting for a just cause. But in February 1940 defeatist sentiments spread among them as the hope for a favourable outcome to the war was being lost by the Finnish army.

By March 12 the troops of the 7th Army captured part of Vyborg, while the 13th Army stepped up its advance on Kexholm. Finland found itself in a hopeless situation, and its representatives signed a peace treaty in Moscow on March 12, 1940, under which hostilities were to cease at 12:00 hours on March 13.

Both sides suffered heavy losses in manpower and weapons in the war. Our troops lost (according to some Soviet figures) 53,522 men killed and 16,208 missing, some of them taken prisoner. Our wounded numbered 163,772 and frostbitten 12,064.

The Finnish troops, who were on the defensive, suffered smaller losses (according to their official statistics)—19,576 killed, 3,273 missing and 43,657 wounded. These figures should be correlated, however, with the four million population of Finland compared to the population of the Soviet Union which was at that time over 170 million. The number of Finns taken prisoner was very small. For example, the troops of the 13th Soviet Army which operated in the main thrust of the offensive took prisoner only 18 non-commissioned officers and 51 soldiers during the entire war. After peace was concluded the prisoners returned home.

But the fate of the Soviet POWs was harsh. Not only did they suffer hardship in Finnish POW camps, but new trials awaited them when they returned home, this time in Stalin's camps.

Here is an example of the sad fate of Soviet POWs. In January 1940 the 44th Infantry Division which operated in the Ukhta offensive zone, i.e., in the narrowest part of Finland, was surrounded by the Finns and taken prisoner en masse. The division commanding officer, Brigade Com-

mander Vinogradov, and several officers of his staff managed to break out of the encirclement and return to Soviet territory. Eyewitnesses said that the officers were shot in front of some 500 servicemen who had remained outside the encirclement. The fate of the POWs themselves was also tragic. After the conclusion of the Peace Treaty all of them were returned to the Soviet side, loaded into goods wagons with boarded-up windows and carted off to Soviet camps under a heavy guard of NKVD troops as "traitors who have broken the oath". Sample questioning of the residents of the communities from which they had been called up showed that their fate had not been discovered by the beginning of the Great Patriotic War or later. Such treatment of Soviet prisoners-of-war assumed a massive scale during the Great Patriotic War when it was applied not to thousands but to millions of Soviet servicemen. . .

The heavy losses of Soviet troops in the war in Finland were explained not only by the specific features of the theatre of operations, the stubborn resistance of the Finns and flaws in organization at the front, but also by the fact that Stalin and the high command acting on his behalf paid no heed to losses which often were too great in view of the results obtained. Here is one typical example.

As we know a Peace Treaty between the USSR and Finland was concluded on March 12, 1940, under which hostilities were to cease at 12:00 hours on March 13 and the border north of Leningrad was pushed back beyond the Vyborg line. But fierce fighting continued in the town on the day when the treaty was signed. It seemed that the Soviet command could have waited for just another day to enable our troops to enter the town without resistance and unnecessary casualties. But they proceeded, on Stalin's orders, to storm the fortress town and captured it after two hours of fierce fighting and many casualties at dawn on March 13. The whole reason, as Kirill Meretskov writes, was to demonstrate to the Finns that the road to Helsinki was open for the Soviet troops, and also to prevent possible intervention on the part of England and France. Though these considerations were certainly taken into account, what Stalin was guided by above all was a desire for prestige. It should be also mentioned that the

text of the Peace Treaty, which was ready by March 12, was not made known either to the troops—so as not to dampen their fighting spirit—or to the Soviet people as a whole.

"I do not know how many," Khrushchev wrote in his memoirs, "but the number of our troops that fell there was much greater than was envisaged by the plan."

POLICY

In the course of the war both Finland and the Soviet Union tried to achieve their goals not only militarily but also by political means. However, some of the methods, far from abating mutual intolerance, only added to it.

History shows that when the guns begin to fire, it does not yet mean that further bloodshed is unavoidable or that there is nothing more the diplomats can do. International law admits of a situation in which a declaration of war does not necessarily entail military action. At the last minute the two sides may try to keep the peace, and such attempts should be encouraged. But if the aggressor country refuses to seek peace, it certainly violates international law.

Unfortunately, this is how the Soviet government acted. As early as December 4 the Finnish side offered to resume the talks with the Soviet Union. On December 1, a new government was formed in Finland headed by Prime Minister Risto Ryti. Väinö Tanner, the former Minister of Finance whom Molotov had called "the evil genius of Finno-Soviet relations," became Minister for Foreign Affairs. Finland's former Foreign Minister, Eljas Erkko, was sent as an envoy to Sweden. The Soviet government ignored these conciliatory gestures by Helsinki, and the war machine began to pick up speed.

Stalin and Molotov took another unworthy step which did not accord with the moral aspect of international law. On the day the fighting began, it was announced in Moscow that the Soviet government had intercepted a radio message indicating that "leftist forces" in the Finnish town

of Terijoki (now Zelenogorsk), just seized by Soviet troops, had formed a "popular government of the Finnish Democratic Republic" headed by Otto Kuusinen. Kuusinen had also become the FDR Foreign Minister. The next day it became known (also from an "intercepted radio message") that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Finland (or rather some of the Central Committee members who were in the Soviet Union) had called on the working people to overthrow the government in Helsinki, not to follow "the treacherous leaders of the Finnish Social-Democrats" who "openly sided with the vicious warmongers," and to establish "a popular government."

Some parts of the document, compiled as it was in Stalin's stereotyped style, produce a strange impression that the authors were divorced from reality and ignorant of the Finnish people's true sentiments. The document disagrees with the unnamed "comrades" who demanded that "Soviet power be established in Finland." The reason for the disagreement is that such an important matter could be decided by all the working classes with the approval of the Diet.

The document further criticizes the same unnamed comrades for speculating on the possibility of Finland's joining the Soviet Union. That is impossible, it says, for two reasons: first, "the Finnish Democratic Republic, as a non-Soviet type of state, cannot be part of the Soviet Union, which represents a state of the Soviet type," and second, "the Soviet Union, following its national policy, would not want to be accused of trying to expand its frontiers. . . "

True, if we are to believe Nikita Khrushchev's memoirs, Kuusinen was intended to "head the government of the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic in the making." But Khrushchev could have been wrong. Indeed, it was officially announced that the FDR government must not be a Soviet-type one. But what if Khrushchev was correct about the Stalin-Molotov scheme?

The policies pursued by Stalin and his entourage in the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia at the same time confirm that these sort of problems were solved quite simply then. Only two months after the populations of

those regions were liberated, they demonstrated a remarkable degree of "political and class maturity and a unanimous desire" to establish Soviet power and be reunited with the Soviet Union. Similar events occurred in the Baltic region some time later. There, too, the "working people," enthusiastically supported by Stalin's emissaries such as Zhdanov, Vyshinsky and Dekanozov, quickly "showed a readiness" to accept Soviet government and join the Soviet Union, though those republics were not "Soviet-type states".

The appeal of the Central Committee of Finland's Communist Party described the Red Army's mission in the war rather ambiguously as being to export revolution and bring happiness to the Finnish people, though they had not asked for it. It stated that the Soviet Union had no intention of "limiting Finland's right to self-determination and sovereignty." Yet, the Red Army was going to Finland "as a liberator of the people from the yoke of capitalist villains," with "hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants looking forward to the Red Army's advent with joyous impatience."

That same day, December 2, 1939, it was announced that the Soviet Union and the "Finnish Democratic Republic" had signed a Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance. The treaty was signed by Molotov and Kuusinen. The announcement, just like the appeal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Finland, maintained that "the Finnish people have established their Democratic Republic, which is wholly based on popular support" and that now "a highly dangerous hotbed of war is being eliminated by the Finnish people's heroic struggle and the Red Army's efforts." It was also reported that a decision had been made to establish a "Finnish People's Army", which the Soviet Union had pledged to assist with arms and equipment on favourable terms. In actual fact, the first units of the "Finnish People's Army" had been formed long before those events. Back on November 11, 1939, the People's Commissar for Defence, Voroshilov, had signed an order to form the 106th rifle division, the first division of the new army. It was commanded by Aksel Anttila, who was also "Minister of Defence" in the "Ku-

usinen government." Several days later the First Finnish Corps began to be formed from among the Finns and Karelians aged under 40 years who were serving in the Leningrad Military District forces. By November 26, the corps had 13,405 men, and it was later built up to over 25,000 men.

Two articles of the treaty on the settlement of territorial matters deserve special mention for their political implications. They noted that as a nation the Finns hoped that the Karelian people would be reunited with them. Accordingly, the Soviet Union was consenting to hand Soviet Karelia (totalling 70,000 square kilometres) to the FDR, and the FDR was consenting to hand the Soviet Union 3,970 square kilometres of territory north of Leningrad, in the Karelian Isthmus. It was also agreed that the Soviet Union would lease the Hanko Peninsula and three to four miles of the adjoining waters for 30 years in order to set up a naval base and would keep a limited contingent of ground and air forces to guard it. The FDR also agreed to sell the Soviet Union for 300 million markkas a number of islands in the Gulf of Finland and the Finnish-owned parts of the Rybachi Peninsula and the Sredni Peninsula on the Arctic coast.

It was stipulated that the two contracting parties pledged to give each other every assistance in the event of attack or threat of attack against Finland and in the event of attack or threat of attack against the Soviet Union through Finnish territory by any European country. The instruments of ratification were to be exchanged in Helsinki.

The creation of the "Kuusinen government", "the Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance", the appeal of the Central Committee of the Finnish Communist Party and other documents of those days placed Finland's Democratic forces, especially the communists, who had always worked for friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union, in an exceptionally difficult position. The majority, however, preferred to fight in defence of their country. As for the leaders of the Finnish Communist Party who were in the Soviet Union, they in effect adopted a defeatist position towards their country.

On the second day of the war the Soviet press announced that "on December 1 people rose in different parts of Finland and proclaimed the founding of a democratic republic." This was a crude lie and an attempt to misinform the Soviet people and the world public. The *Bolshevik* magazine (No. 22 for 1939) claimed, contrary to the facts, that "the Red Army has come to Finland to the aid of the Finnish people, at the invitation of their Popular Government, to assist them in their struggle against political swindlers. . . "

Such were official reports about the first days of the war. Archival documents in our possession, however, make it possible to clarify the situation and evaluate those events differently.

The first question that has to be asked is what was behind the farce of creating a "popular government" and signing a "treaty" with it? It might well have been an attempt to mislead world opinion. It was indeed announced that the Soviet Union was not waging any war against Finland, hence it could not bear any responsibility for aggression. Quite possibly, the "popular government" was conceived as a means of provoking a civil war. Indeed, the appeal of the Central Committee of the Finnish Communist Party called on people from different walks of life to rise in a struggle for liberation and overthrow the "government of hangmen". Another possibility is that the "Kuusinen government" was created in a bid to pressure the government of the Finnish Republic into accepting the Soviet terms and stopping the war. This is corroborated by a statement made by Molotov to the Swedish envoy in Moscow, Vilhelm Assarsson, on March 4, 1940, to the effect that if the Finnish government continued to object to handing over Vyborg and Sortavala to the Soviet Union, the subsequent Soviet terms of peace would be even harsher and the Soviet Union would make the final agreement with the Kuusinen government.

There is yet another political move by Stalin and Molotov that can shed some light on their goals in the war against Finland. This refers to the Soviet Union's attitude to the League of Nations.

The Soviet government rejected mediation by the

League of Nations, an international organization of which both the Soviet Union and Finland were members. On December 3, the Finnish Ambassador to the League of Nations, Rudolf Holsti, informed its Secretary-General Joseph Avenol, that on the morning of November 30 the Soviet Union had suddenly attacked not only frontier positions but Finnish towns, denouncing the Peace Treaty of 1920 and the Non-Aggression Treaty which was due to expire in 1945. He asked for the Council and the Assembly to be convened so as to stop the aggression.

If it was Finland, as the Soviet government maintained, that had provoked the war and been the aggressor, the Soviet Union being the victim, it would stand to reason that the USSR, not Finland, would have shown the initiative and complained to the League of Nations before using force.

How did the Soviet government react to the Finnish complaint to the League of Nations?

Replying to the League of Nations' Secretary-General on December 4, 1939, Molotov said that, in the first place, the Soviet Union was not at war with Finland and was not threatening the Finnish people with war. Secondly, the Soviet Union maintained peaceful relations with the FDR, and had signed a Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance with its government on December 2. The treaty, it was alleged, settled all matters. Thirdly, Finland's formed government had resigned. And fourthly, the Soviet Union and the FDR were now making joint efforts to defuse the highly dangerous hotbet of war created in Finland by its former rulers. Obviously, Molotov's cynical message was intended for simpletons and, without doubt, constituted a flagrant violation of international norms. Molotov further stated that if the Council and the Assembly convened to consider Holsti's complaint, the Soviet government would not attend.

The 20th Assembly of the League of Nations was convened on December 11 and founded an ad hoc committee on the Finnish question, chaired by de Matta. The next day the committee appealed to the Soviet and Finnish governments to terminate the hostilities and, with the Assembly's mediation, immediately open talks to restore

peace. The government of Finland accepted the proposal at once, but Molotov refused again. On December 14, 1939, having exhausted all the possibilities of terminating the Soviet-Finnish conflict, the League of Nations adopted a resolution proposed by Brazil and other Latin American countries to expel the Soviet Union from the League of Nations, condemning "the action of the Soviet Union against the Finnish state" and urging all member states of the League of Nations to give Finland material and humanitarian aid.

On December 16, 1939, *Izvestia* printed a TASS report, saying that authoritative Soviet circles saw the League of Nations' action as scandalous and unlawful, since out of the 15 Council members only seven had voted for the expulsion of the Soviet Union and the others either were absent or abstained. "Thereby," said the TASS statement, "instead of facilitating the termination of the war between Germany and the Anglo-French bloc, which in effect should have been the mission of the League of Nations if it had remained 'an instrument of peace', the present League of Nations, having proclaimed a policy of supporting the war-mongers in Finland, the Mannerheim-Tanner clique, has embarked on the road of inciting war in Europe's northeast as well."

On December 17, 1939, *Izvestia* commented on why the Soviet government had ignored the appeal of the League of Nations: "As for the Soviet Union, at all events it will not stand to lose from the decision in Geneva. This decision rids the USSR of moral responsibility for the 'activities' of the Geneva institution and at the same time frees the Soviet Union from the commitments stemming from the League's Charta." And the newspaper summed up: "We have been granted freedom of action."

How should the Soviet reaction to the conciliatory services proposed by the League of Nations be appraised? Without doubt, it constituted a blatant violation of international law. True, in those years peaceful settlement of international disputes was considered optional. Nor was there any effective mechanism of de-escalation. The League of Nations could possibly have become one, but the Soviet side was obviously uninterested in its mediation

services.

It would appear that by using force against Finland and refusing to settle the dispute peacefully, the Soviet Union did not formally violate the principle of international law, as fixed in the Hague Convention of 1907 on the peaceful settlement of international conflicts, since it did not officially declare war on Finland.

But one has to bear in mind that, in the first place, the Soviet Union, as a socialist state, had domestic legislation (such as the 1917 Decree on Peace) prohibiting recourse to a war of aggression. Secondly, although the mediation institution provided only advice and recommendations, the Soviet Union should not have ignored its moral value, which was already then becoming increasingly important in international relations.

The subsequent political and military actions by the Soviet leaders seriously compromised their professed goals in that war. They ignored one of the oldest and most important principles of international law—respect for the sovereignty of other nations and non-intervention in their internal affairs.

In many respects Soviet foreign policy was an extension of Stalin's reactionary and terrorist policy at home. In the latter half of the 1930s the Finns and Karelians living in the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the Leningrad region were increasingly discriminated against. In the 1920s and early 1930s a dozen Finnish-language newspapers and periodicals were published in Leningrad, and the Kirja Publishers were based there. In 1935 the writers' organization in Karelia consisted of 35 members. But things took a dramatic turn for the worse in the second half of the 1930s. Under Stalin's arbitrary rule, the Finnish-language schools and publications in Leningrad and Karelia were shut down, the application of the Finnish language was curtailed, and those who spoke out in its defence were accused of "Great-Finnish nationalism." On September 11, 1937, *Pravda* said: "The Communists and all working people of Karelia were greatly satisfied with the *Pravda* review which exposed the bourgeois nationalistic agents of Finnish and German intelligence and their accomplices at the regional Party

Committee and the editorial board of the newspaper *Krasnaya Karelia*."

The situation was further aggravated in 1938. The Karelian writers' organization ceased to exist. By 1940 the standard Karelian language, which had been hastily created through the mechanical mixing of the local dialects, had passed into oblivion.

Politically, the Soviet-Finnish war destabilized the general situation in Northern Europe and created the threat of involving other countries, which would have been highly dangerous for the Soviet Union.

Some Soviet historians have maintained that Germany was interested in the war between the Soviet Union and Finland, and was staking on Finland's victory. This does not quite correspond to the reality of the situation. Being bound by its obligations under the secret protocol with the Soviet Union and engaged in war against the Western powers, Germany remained neutral in the Soviet-Finnish war. A new war theatre in Northern Europe would have been against the German interests for at least two reasons: it would have impaired Germany's strategic material supplies from Sweden and Finland, and it would have absorbed Soviet resources intended for Germany. Back on September 27, 1939, in a lengthy report to Ribbentrop about the situation in Finland, the German envoy to Helsinki, von Blücher, said that Britain's dominant influence on the Finnish economy was waning. The Finns' hopes for support from the Scandinavian countries were becoming unrealistic. Russia, which had been regarded as a hibernating bear, had now woken up and set its expansionist sights on the West. Germany's military power, which had been demonstrated in Poland, had totally changed the balance of forces on the continent.

Many Finns, von Blücher went on to say, continued to think in old stereotypes, hoping that their country could stay out of international upheavals. The fear that the Finns had always had of Russia had intensified after the Red Army invaded Poland. This fear had even afflicted the military leaders, headed by Marshal Mannerheim. The Foreign Minister, Eljas Erkko, who had been known for his Anglophilia and Russophobia, had also suffered a

change of heart. Now he was arguing that Finland could not pursue an anti-Russian policy any more. He did not object to leasing some islands in the Gulf of Finland to the Russians.

A fortnight later, on October 7, 1939, von Blücher received categorial instructions from Berlin: we must not interfere in the Russo-Finnish differences and should strive for good relations between Finland and Russia. Several days later, replying to inquiries from the Swedish envoy to Berlin, the state secretary at the German Foreign Ministry, von Weizsäcker, assured him that Ribbentrop had not discussed the future of Finland in Moscow and that, in his opinion, Russia did not have any far-reaching plans regarding Finland.

Concerning the forthcoming Soviet-Finnish talks in Moscow, the German envoy to Helsinki dispatched a report to Berlin on October 10, 1939, saying that if Russia did not limit its demands to the islands in the Gulf of Finland, he believed Finland was going to fight on. This would cause problems for the German munitions industry since supplies of copper, molibdenum, food and timber from Finland would be discontinued. The envoy recommended that Russia be advised not to stretch its demands.

In reply to this dispatch, von Blücher received the following explanation from von Weizsäcker: according to the obligations assumed under the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, they could not support any third party. If they supported, say, Sweden, this would strengthen the positions of Sweden and Finland in their resistance to the Russians, which would damage Soviet-German relations.

Regarding Germany's position on the Soviet-Finnish war, one can talk of that country's intervention on the side of the Soviet Union rather than that of Finland. There is some corroboration for this. On December 9 the German Ambassador in Moscow, Werner von Schulenburg, reported to Berlin that the Soviet naval command was planning to impose a submarine blockade of the Gulf of Bothnia to stop Western aid from reaching Finland. With reference to this, the Soviet command asked if German ships bound for Sweden could supply the Soviet submarines with fuel and food on the condition that these resources would be

returned to German ships calling at Soviet ports.

The Ambassador recommended that the request be granted for three reasons: first, it could not affect the outcome of the war; second, Germany would receive a compensation, for instance, in Soviet ports in the Far East, where there were good possibilities for German naval forces to conduct combat operations; and third, it would make it possible to file a similar request with the Soviet naval forces in the future. The Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, Admiral Raeder, having consulted the Führer, gave his consent to the operation.

Many other steps made by Germany in the course of the Soviet-Finnish war indicate that it did everything possible not to burden its relations with the Soviet Union, which it considered to be of paramount importance. For example, the German government turned down Finland's request for military equipment to be shipped to Finland through German territory. Only on Hitler's personal authorization was one trainload of Italian warplanes the Finns had bought before the outbreak of the war allowed through. On December 19 Germany stated in a message to the Swedish government that Sweden's support for Finland could lead to repressive military actions against Sweden. When von Blücher, citing rumours in Helsinki, inquired what position Germany should take in the event of Sweden furnishing assistance to Finland, Ribbentrop replied: "An Ambassador must not take part in these affairs. We are neutral in this conflict and have other concerns than to deal with such hypothetical contingencies. The basis of our position on North European affairs is our friendship with the Soviet Union."

In the course of the war von Weizsäcker repeatedly reminded German missions abroad that they should blame the conflict on Britain and "Finland's misguided government" and in conversation make clear their sympathies for the Russians and their antipathy to the Finns.

On March 4, 1940, in a talk with the Swedish explorer, Sven Hedin, who supported Nazism, Hitler justified Stalin's actions against Finland. He said that Stalin demanded nothing more than access to an unfreezing sea. In this war, Hitler was reported as saying, Stalin had seriously changed

his politics: he was no longer an international Bolshevik but rather a Russian nationalist following the natural policies of the Russian tsars. He was demanding access to unfreezing ports and shifting the border away from Leningrad, offering the Finns a compensation in Karelia. So the Finns would do well, according to Hitler, to make peace with the Russians on that basis.

Germany did undertake some attempts at mediation. On February 13, 1940, Ribbentrop asked von Blücher to explore the possibility of Soviet representatives meeting secretly in Berlin, with Paasikivi, for instance. Several days later von Blücher sent back a report saying he had talked the matter over with Tanner. However, the Finnish Foreign Minister had assessed the mediation offer as an attempt to weaken the Finnish people's power of resistance and had not given a definite reply. In early March 1940 when fighting had flared up near Vyborg, Finland's government asked Berlin to use its influence on the Soviet Union to persuade it to abandon its claim to Vyborg and the territory northwest of Lake Ladoga. Von Blücher recommended that the request be supported since it would be in Germany's interests for the Finns to retain their control over such an important port and industrial centre as Vyborg.

Berlin politicians were satisfied by the conclusion of peace on March 12, 1940. Goebbels wrote in his diary that this was considered "a big diplomatic victory" for Germany.

Germany's views on the Soviet-Finnish war were spelled out with particular clarity in a memorandum filed by Kurt von Tippelskirch, a counsellor of the German Embassy in Moscow, on January 25, 1940. The memorandum is worth reproducing as fully as possible.

Von Tippelskirch said that the Soviet-Finnish war had aroused mixed feelings in Germany since it had produced both problems and advantages. On the one hand, the war had inconvenienced Germany, and its enemies had exploited this factor in their propaganda. The war situation and its unpredictable outcome had done serious damage to German-Finnish trade and had dampened the USSR's economic performance to the detriment of Germany. Fur-

thermore, the Soviet Union had compromised itself before the rest of the world, and Germany, as an ally of the Soviet Union, could not be indifferent to this. One could not rule out the possibility of the Soviet Union becoming intricated in the war with Britain and France; then Germany would lose it as an exporter and a guarantor of its strategic rear.

On the other hand, von Tippelskirch went on to say, the war had produced quite a few advantages for Germany. For example, the war difficulties had had a sobering effect on the Soviet government in assessing its imaginary supremacy and achievements. After the walkover in Poland, where the Wehrmacht had played the major role, and after the successful actions in the Baltic region, the Soviet Union had hoped that the war with Finland would be quite an easy operation. But its formidable difficulties and setbacks, especially with the Kuusinen government, had served as a kind of warning to the Soviet Union and the Communist International and enfeebled their ideas about a world revolution the way they wished to see it happen.

All things considered, von Tippelskirch concluded, the Soviet Union might well become even more closely associated with Germany. The Soviet Union's new and friendly relations with Germany, the part it played in the partition of Poland and its attack against Finland had caused other countries to change their attitudes towards the Soviet Union. Therefore, allied relations with Germany were for the time being of exceptional importance to the Soviet Union.

Italy, Germany's ally in the Anti-Comintern Pact, had unconditionally supported Finland and assisted it in many ways. On the other hand, judging from von Blücher's description of the situation in the Baltic region after the conclusion of peace, in his report of March 13, 1940, Berlin had to consider the Soviet Union's increased influence on Scandinavia and the Baltic sea lanes, which could not help worrying Germany. Without doubt, as General Franz Halder wrote in his diary, some groups in Berlin, especially the military, were satisfied with the fact that "the conflict with Finland is pushing Russia into the

anti-British camp."

As for Britain and France, they were totally on Finland's side and made every effort to prevent its defeat. From the beginning of its action against Finland the Soviet government was aware of the potential reaction on the part of the Western powers. Hence, the Soviet command had planned the war as a swift operation. In their order of December 2 (the third day of the operation) Voroshilov and Shaposhnikov noted the slow and hesitant advance of the 8th and 9th Armies. "We cannot hang around in Finland too long, advancing four or five kilometres a day. The whole thing must be finished off quickly with a resolute offensive by our forces."

The Soviet command's anxiety was not groundless. If the war had dragged out, Britain and France might have joined in on Finland's side.

The Soviet government kept complaining that Britain was inciting Finland to take anti-Soviet actions. London flatly denied the accusation. Before going on holiday in late December 1939, the British Ambassador to Moscow, William Seeds, had a long talk with the First Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Potyomkin. The Ambassador said that his country wished to maintain amicable relations with the Soviet Union. It was not inciting Finland since it wished peace to be maintained in Scandinavia and it favoured neutrality on the part of the Soviet Union. The Ambassador added that the British government had advised the Finns to be prudent and had disapproved of Tanner's intransigence. After refusing further talks with the Finns, said the Ambassador, the Soviet Union had adopted a "fine" position, refraining from its claims to all of Finland and restricting itself to the objects of which Stalin had spoken at the talks with Tanner and Paasikivi. The Ambassador assured Potyomkin that Britain was giving no official aid to Finland; this was being done by public organizations, businesses and individuals.

This was not quite true, to put it mildly. Back in mid-December 1939 London had considered the possibility of obtaining permission from Sweden and Norway for Anglo-French forces to enter their territories so as to provide joint assistance for Finland. The Supreme Mili-

tary Council of the Western Allies feared that the Soviet forces might quickly cross Finland and reach the Swedish and Norwegian borders. But in late December 1939, since the fighting in Finland did not present a direct threat to Sweden and Norway, the allies mapped out a more cautious plan. They assured the governments of the two countries of their readiness to render them assistance, but the offer was flatly rejected. In the months that followed the Supreme Military Council devised other contingency plans to achieve two goals: to provide Finland with aid should that country request it, and to take control of the Swedish iron-ore fields, upon Sweden's consent. But Sweden rejected the plan, and in early March 1940, when the Soviet Union and Finland had opened peace talks, the plan lost all relevance.

The United States sided with Britain and France. In January 1940 the US Congress approved the sale of 10,000 rifles to Finland. A large group of American military pilots was sent to Helsinki, and the recruiting of volunteers was encouraged. The White House stated that the enlistment of American nationals in the Finnish army did not run counter to the US neutrality act.

Political parties in different countries held divergent views on the war. Bourgeois parties were unconditionally for providing Finland with all-round military, political and moral support, and assessed the Soviet Union's actions as aggression. In some countries they began to create groups of volunteers to assist the Finnish army. The Second International and Social-Democratic parties also supported Finland and campaigned for terminating the war. Catholic parties and organizations adhered to pacifist views. Trade union attitudes to the war differed according to their political orientations.

The Communist International (Third International) and Communist parties argued that the Soviet Union had taken legitimate action, and criticized the Western powers. Supporters of the Fourth International and Trotsky himself were of the same opinion and defended the interests of the Soviet Union as "the first state of the workers and peasants." Yet, they insisted that the interests of the Soviet people should be distinguished from the interests of "Stal-

in's regime", which, with its reign of terror and contempt for democracy, was weakening the Soviet Union's war efforts against international imperialism. They urged the working people of Finland and other capitalist countries to overthrow their bourgeois governments and thereby promote the Soviet Union's rightful cause.

Some of the Russian and Ukrainian emigre groups offered their services to the Finnish government. They were prepared to send volunteer legions to Finland and raise donations. After the establishment of the "FDR government" led by Kuusinen, some emigre leaders called on the Western countries and Finland to agree to the founding of "a Russian national government in exile."

The foreign-policy actions of Finland's ruling groups were aimed at securing Western support. The Western governments were willing to comply. At the Finnish government's request, a campaign was launched in some of the countries of Western and Northern Europe, particularly Sweden and Norway, to recruit volunteers to fight for Finland. In all, eleven thousand volunteers arrived, including 8,000 Swedes, 1,000 Norwegians and 600 Danes. All of them were insufficiently trained for combat, and only two infantry battalions and two artillery batteries had been dispatched to the front by March 1, 1940.

In the course of war, Finland received 500 guns, 350 planes, over 6,000 machine-guns, about 100,000 rifles, and various other armaments from 13 Western countries. It is true, that for fear of Finland being turned into a battlefield with all the ensuing horrible consequences, its leadership did not venture to formally request Britain and France to join the war against the Soviet Union. But there was the danger of Britain, France and Turkey severing diplomatic relations with the USSR.

All told, the fires of war in Northern Europe were put out in the long run. The region did not become another hotbed of World War Two: the Soviet-Finnish war, which lasted 105 days, remained localized.

PEACE

One of the most important points about the Soviet-Finnish war was that intense diplomatic efforts proceeded in parallel with the fighting. The Finnish side was particularly interested in this. The Soviet Union was naturally interested only in victory and in seeing the "FDR government" installed in Finland's capital.

The Soviet Union and Finland showed a mutual interest in concluding peace when the war entered a critical phase for them both. For the Soviet Union this was the time when the threat of Western intervention became particularly apparent and when silent discontent over that unnecessary war grew among the Soviet people. For Finland, the war had increasingly become a heavy economic, moral and political burden, which made even the military think of ways to end it.

It was in late December 1939, and especially in January 1940, that both sides launched intense diplomatic efforts. Sweden and Norway also had a stake in seeing the war come to an end, and acted as mediators in the diplomatic contacts. Some prominent public figures in Finland and Scandinavia joined in the efforts to defuse the conflict. At Tanner's request, Hella Wuolijoki, a distinguished author and public personality in Finland, arrived in Stockholm on January 10, 1940, to meet with Soviet representatives. Tanner had briefed her by saying that the Finnish government had not expected such a strong military reaction from the Soviet Union in November 1939. It had waited for the final Soviet ultimatum so as to refer to it in trying to persuade the Diet to accept the Soviet terms. In Tan-

ner's words, his government could not possibly have agreed to these terms before because the aggressive Skyddskar organization might have unleashed a civil war. Now he believed this could be done, since, for one thing, many of the Skyddskar members had died in the war and, for another, Finland would not be able to stand up to another Soviet offensive.

After repeated contacts with the Soviet envoy to Sweden, Alexandra Kollontai, Hella Wuolijoki met Soviet representatives from Moscow on January 21. Strange as it may seem, these were NKVD officials, not people from the foreign ministry. They were told that the Finnish government and Diet were prepared to accept all the terms that the Soviet government had presented to the "Kuusinen government."

Simultaneously, at the Soviet Union's suggestion, the Swedish government joined in the mediation effort. When talking to Alexandra Kollontai, the Swedish Prime Minister, Per Albin Hansson, expressed his interest in speeding up the end of what he called the "intermezzo" in Finland. He said further: "If the conflict drags on another two or three months, the Cabinet will find it extremely difficult to withstand the pressure of the 'interventionists'. . . " (the Swedish supporters of Anglo-French intervention in the Soviet-Finnish war). Hansson asked Kollontai: "Isn't it clear in Moscow that if you come to an agreement with the Ryti-Tanner government, it will be a most bitter blow to Britain?" If the conflict continued, the Swedish Prime Minister concluded, Britain would establish a bridgehead in Scandinavia and move the fighting there.

In the first half of February, after the Soviet forces had pierced the Mannerheim Line, Tanner made two visits to Stockholm. He met Kollontai, and later the Foreign Minister, Christian Günther, and Prime Minister Hansson. The Swedish leaders strongly recommended that Finland should hold negotiations with the Soviet Union itself and not provoke the involvement of Scandinavian countries in the war.

The government of Norway made diplomatic efforts as well. In January 1940 the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Halvdan Koht, wrote Kollontai a long letter accusing the

Finns of intransigence and outlining his own plan for settling the conflict. Koht had actually informed the German Ambassador to Norway, Curt Bräuer, of his plan back on December 15, 1939. He suggested the following: Finland could conclude a special pact with the Soviet Union and Estonia to ensure security in the Gulf of Finland and regard the gulf as closed to foreign warships. They could jointly defend it. Such a pact could substitute for the mutual assistance pact proposed by the Soviet Union but rejected by Finland for fear that it would violate that country's neutrality. It could be supplemented with a pact between Finland and Sweden concerning the neutrality of the Gulf of Bothnia. Koht offered to mediate in organizing potential talks between the Soviet Union and Finland.

His appeal to the Soviet government and his attempts to influence the Finnish government reflected the widespread peaceful sentiments of the Norwegians which were facilitating the peace process in the north of Europe.

A contribution to the mediation effort was made in February 1940 by Vilhelm Assarsson, who had just been appointed Swedish envoy to Moscow. When he presented his credentials on February 20, 1940, he told Molotov that Sweden now realized that Finland would have to make concessions and resume the talks, and that Sweden was prepared to convey the Soviet proposals to Finland. Molotov replied that it had now become clear that Finland had been prepared as a foreign bridgehead against the Soviet Union and that blood had been shed; therefore the Soviet Union could not accept the minimum terms that would have satisfied it before the war. The Soviet Union could no longer limit its demands only to a part of the Karelian Isthmus; it was demanding the whole of the isthmus, including Vyborg, and the territory north of Lake Ladoga. The Soviet demand regarding Hanko also stood. On the other hand, the Soviet government was prepared to consider security guarantees for the Gulf of Finland by signing an agreement between the Soviet Union, Finland and Estonia (a point clearly reminiscent of Koht's proposals). Some of the areas seized by the Red Army north of Lake Ladoga could be exchanged for other parts of Finland

which the Soviet Union needed. The Soviet government did not object to returning Petsamo to Finland. But Molotov warned the Swedish envoy that, firstly, all this was only possible provided the war did not drag out and the situation did not deteriorate further, and, secondly, the information was intended only for the Swedish government and was not to be passed on to the Finnish government until it became clear that Finland would accept the Soviet proposals as a framework for agreement with the USSR.

A day later Assarsson told Molotov that the Finnish government did not object to receiving Western aid, but in order to avoid this it was prepared to settle the conflict according to the Soviet terms, and suggested that the Soviet Union send a delegation to Stockholm to meet a Finnish delegation. Molotov asked for more information about the Finnish terms, and the next day, that is February 23, it was provided to Alexandra Kollontai by Christian Günther. It stated that Finland agreed in principle to accept all the Soviet terms.

Yet over the next few days the situation was not sufficiently clear. The British government turned down the Soviet request to act as mediator. The position of the Finnish government and the Diet was not too clear either, since the next time Tanner visited Stockholm, on February 27, he did not talk with Kollontai but asked Sweden for urgent aid. It was not until March 1, when the situation on the front had become hopeless for Finland, and there was pressure from the supreme military command (especially Mannerheim), that Finland's government agreed to enter into peace negotiations, and Kollontai was informed about this.

Alexandra Kollontai played a special role in the diplomatic probings that took place in Stockholm. Politicians in Stockholm used to say that, had it not been for Kollontai, Sweden might have been drawn into the conflict and had to fight against the Russians. Despite her advanced age and her first stroke, she had to bear the strain of the intense preliminary peace contacts. Her car was said to be constantly parked at the Swedish Foreign Ministry in Gustavus Adolphus Square.

Nevertheless, having agreed to negotiations, the Finnish government did not hurry to send a delegation to Moscow. Tensions mounted as the preparations for the peace talks continued. The Finns announced their objection to giving away the town of Vyborg and Sortavala, which was unaceptable to the Soviet Union. On March 4, 1940, Molotov told Assarsson that the Soviet government would not make any more concessions and it was only out of respect for Sweden's peace policy that it was prepared to wait a few more days, but that the future Soviet conditions would be even harsher. In that case, said Molotov, the USSR would make the final agreement with the Kuusinen government, and Britain and France would hardly venture to take action against the Soviet Union.

In this sutation Sweden and Norway again played an important role as peace-makers. On March 5 the Swedish government told the Finns that it would not permit Anglo-French forces to cross its territory, and insistently advised Finland to stop immediately the hostilities and dispatch a delegation to Moscow to open the peace talks.

On the morning of March 5, after a certain amount of wrangling and hesitation, the Finnish government decided not to ask the West for aid or, more precisely, to put off the decision until March 12, and to accept the Soviet peace terms. The Swedes immediately communicated the important news to Moscow and, for their part, proposed to the Finns that military actions be ceased as of March 6. True, the war continued on that day, but the next morning a Finnish peace delegation led by Prime Minister Risto Ryti flew to Moscow from Stockholm. The delegation included Juho Paasikivi. On March 11, after four days of talks, the Finnish Cabinet and the foreign policy commission of the Diet accepted the Soviet terms. The next day the two sides signed a peace treaty and a protocol to it. The disputed problems were settled in the Soviet Union's favour.

In accordance with the treaty, the Soviet Union took over the entire Karelian Isthmus (including Vyborg), the Vyborg Bay with the islands, the western and the northern shores of Lake Ladoga with the towns of Kexholm, Sortavala and Suojärvi, parts of the Rybachi and Sredni Peninsulas, small areas east of Märkäjärvi and the town of

Kuolajärvi. Finland granted the Soviet Union a 30-year lease on the Hanko Peninsula with the right to deploy a naval base there, and the Soviet Union pledged to withdraw its forces from the Petsamo region. Finland pledged not to establish naval ports on its northern coast and not to keep warships, except for small ones, in those waters. The Soviet Union obtained the right of customs-free transit to and from Norway through the Petsamo region, and goods transit between the Soviet Union and Sweden. The Soviet Union and Finland pledged not to conclude any alliances or participate in coalitions directed against either of the contracting parties.

The peace treaty signified an improvement of the Soviet Union's strategic positions in the northwest, though it had been achieved at a dear price. Leningrad was now 150 kilometres from the new border. The towns there held a certain significance for the development of the whole region. Vyborg, with a population of over 80,000, was an industrial centre, a large sea port and a railway hub. Seven motorways and five railways passed through it. Kexholm, a town with 5,000 residents, had fishing and timber industries. Serdobol, also a town of 5,000 people, had a paper mill and a cellulose factory; nearby there were granite mines and iron-ore fields. The town of Pitkyaranta was a mining centre. Europe's largest lake, Ladoga, had many islands and several towns on its shores.

The Soviet demands accepted by Finland caused the country economic, political and moral damage. So after the signing of the peace treaty neighbourly relations were impossible between the two countries. In their bid to regain what the country had lost, Finland's right-wing forces had now found support not only in the government but among the public at large. The Finnish government considered that the treaty was unfair and had been imposed by military force. On the whole, it regarded the situation which developed after March 1940 as an armistice, rather than peace. As soon as the winter war came to an end, the right-wing forces began to prepare for a continuation of the war. They resented the peace treaty. Martial law was virtually retained in the country and the

militaristic groups built up their influence.

Nor did the Soviet leadership view the "Finnish problem" as solved once and for all. During the Molotov-Hitler talks in Berlin, in November 1940, the Soviet side demanded freedom of action as regarded Finland, and a statement from the Germans that they had no interest in the region. Molotov insisted that the previous agreement concerning Finland be fulfilled and referred to the appendix to the Soviet-German treaty of August 23, 1939, in which Finland was considered a sphere of Soviet influence.

It was not in Germany's interest, however, to see the Soviet Union build up its influence in Northern Europe or improve its strategic positions in the region. Accordingly, Hitler stated that he was "interested in a period of calm in Finland in order to receive nickel and timber from there" and warned that another conflict in the Baltic region would deal a blow at German-Soviet relations with unpredictable consequences. Naturally, Hitler sent word to Helsinki about his talks, which accelerated Finland's rapprochement with Germany.

Germany exploited this rapprochement in the summer of 1940 when, having defeated France, it began to prepare for aggression against the USSR and to build up to this end a bloc with countries neighbouring on the Soviet Union. Germany counted on military collaboration with the Finnish government. Finland complied, and in effect joined the Hitler bloc. In November 1941 it signed the Anti-Comintern Pact. With that, in Urho Kekkonen's words, the mésalliance between the traditionally democratic Finland and the national-socialist dictatorship of "Greater Germany" was "legitimized."

On June 25, 1941, the day after the Soviet airforce had delivered a series of pre-emptive strikes at Finnish airfields where German warplanes were deployed, President Ryti declared over the radio a state of war with the Soviet Union. But it was not until June 29 that Finland actually started hostilities. This was how the Finnish people was drawn by its leadership into a criminal war against the Soviet Union. By September 1941 the Finnish forces had occupied not only the territory the Soviet Union had taken over under the 1940 Peace Treaty, but large expanses of

Soviet territory all the way to the rivers Sestra and Svir. They turned Leningrad on the north and the east, and joined the German armies in blockading the city. So they too are responsible for the suffering and death of hundreds of thousands of the city's residents. Part of the responsibility for the tragedy certainly falls on Stalin and Molotov, who, by provoking the 1939-40 war against Finland, strained relations with that country and objectively pushed it onto the road of revanche.

After Finland had been defeated and an armistice agreement had been signed with it in September 1944, the Soviet Union (just like Britain which had also been at war with Finland) did not insist that it capitulate unconditionally. Finland's territory was not occupied. The Allied Control Commission in Finland, which was headed by one of Stalin's associates, Andrei Zhdanov, had quite extensive powers, but, as Finnish leaders admitted, it was always considerate of the Finnish government's views. Finland was made to pay an insignificant indemnity,* and even this sum was halved in 1948. However, it must be said that Finland had to agree to the restoration of the territorial provisions of the 1940 Peace Treaty and to some other additional losses.

*Finland agreed to pay 300 million dollars out of the 1,000 million assigned to it.

LESSONS

In assessing the positions of the belligerents or the lessons of the Soviet-Finnish war, one should realize that appearances can be deceptive. Indeed, the Soviet Union scored a victory, but was it a clean victory?

In its social and political dimensions the war between the Soviet Union and Finland was a complicated and contradictory affair. It cannot be summed up as "just" or "unjust". Both governments were responsible, though to differing degrees. When the political crisis reached its breaking point, Finland's leadership refused to make concessions, while the Soviet Union, confident of its military superiority, was half-hearted about using political means to settle the dispute. Instead of nipping the war in the bud, it actually took the initiative in unleashing it.

Politically, the war caused the Soviet Union serious damage. Stalin's authoritarian, wilful approach to relations with Finland cost the Soviet Union dearly. The international prestige it had gained in the 1930s (despite the repressions within the country) when the Soviet Union had stood up against fascism and campaigned for collective security, tottered. People had difficulty understanding why the powerful Soviet Union had not avoided the use of force in a dispute with a small neighbour.

The Soviet leaders' behaviour in the war is indefensible. Nothing can justify it, even such a vital factor as the security of Leningrad. The war was the consequence of the short-sighted policy of Stalin, Molotov and Voroshilov, their great-power attitudes, and their contempt for the reality of the situation. It confirmed once again that any

attempt to ensure one's security by unfair methods, flouting the security interests of other countries, is bound to lead to flagrant violations of generally recognized rules of international law, with the aggressor being ostracized and its prestige dropping among other members of the international community.

The war severed the thin threads of cooperation that had existed between the Soviet Union and Finland. It undermined the influence of the Communist Party of Finland and other public organizations that had always advocated friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union. The Soviet government's decision to take military action against Finland resulted from the dogmatism and sectarianism that dominated the Soviet foreign policy of those years. It ignored the interests of the other side as well as public opinion. It was adopted undemocratically, behind closed doors.

The Soviet people held controversial views on the war against Finland. On the one hand, many were afflicted by "heroic ignorance," since they did not have any truthful information about the real state of affairs. On the other hand, discontent over the pointless war was growing. In early January 1940, von Schulenburg said in a report to Hitler that the Soviet-Finnish war was unpopular among the Soviet people. The fear of an imminent war with Germany, which had been mitigated by the signing of the Soviet-German treaty, had flared up again because of the war with Finland. The setbacks on the front, he reported, were lowering the people's morale. The population feared that prices would go up, and the arrival of large numbers of frost-bitten Red Army men from the front was causing anxiety. Similar reports were dispatched by other embassies in Moscow.

Some Finnish statesmen have unequivocally denounced the policy of Finland's leadership before the war as short-sighted and inflexible. Back in 1946, Juho Paasikivi said that in the 1920s and 1930s Soviet Russia had been weak and "Finland believed that Soviet Russia would always remain so and must be pushed to the eastern corner of the Gulf of Finland, which is so narrow that, as the Russians told us in Tartu, a large ship can hardly turn

around here. But in 1939 the situation was different."

Paasikivi said further: "I was then of the opinion that Stalin's restrained and moderate demands, especially concerning the Karelian Isthmus, should be met. A wiser policy would have been to state: 'We agree to establishing the Karelian Isthmus border along the Suvanto-Summa line, thus giving away half of the Karelian Isthmus.' By the way, that was the minimum demand of the Soviet military—as Stalin said at the negotiations—and on this basis we would have reached agreement with Stalin. That would have shown real statesmanship, but we, myself included, lacked it. That is why I humbly admit that I played some part in the fateful political mistakes, which evidenced a lack of acumen."

President Urho Kekkonen of Finland pointed out that the security of both Finland and Leningrad was an age-old problem and attempts to resolve it by war had never been successful. "National prejudice and political mistrust made it impossible to seek a solution to the problem through cooperation based on mutual trust. We had to go through horrible suffering before we concluded that the best security guarantee in relations between Finland and the Soviet Union was good-neighbourly relations based on mutual trust, including respect for each other's way of life."

Prior to the 1939-40 war, any discussion of relations between Finland and the Soviet Union was brought to a deadlock over the question of Finland's position in the event of a third power deciding to attack the Soviet Union through Finland's territory without its consent. In 1978 President Kekkonen said: "Now the government of Finland is ready to answer that question, which is a quite legitimate one." And he quoted Juho Paasikivi as saying in 1947: "Finland wishes to stay out of conflicts but should the inviolability of its territory be infringed upon, it will defend itself with all available means and, if need be, with the help of the Soviet Union."

The good-neighbourly relations that have been established between the Soviet Union and Finland in the post-war years make it possible to provide a comprehensive and objective analysis of the tragic episodes of our history,

including of course the 1939-40 war. On September 19, 1974, President Kekkonen said: "It is not simply a matter of being ashamed of the grim past, even if it was stained with blood. We need to draw lessons from this past." Obviously, the Soviet Union should do the same. It is exceptionally important to establish the degree of responsibility of both sides for the 1939-40 war.

As far as the Finnish side is concerned, its official representatives do not accept that Finland started the war against the Soviet Union or provoked it. This was stated by Juho Paasikivi, who headed the Finnish delegation at the talks in Moscow in March 1944, and Molotov, in effect, agreed with him.

Urho Kekkonen, Paasikivi's successor as President of Finland, who took part in the negotiations with Molotov in Moscow in the early 1950s, held the same opinion: "I expressed regret that the past events had taken such a course and said that I did not know if Finland was entirely to blame for this, but that possibly Finland bore the main responsibility. Molotov replied that we too were to blame. Consequently, mutual suspicion had made both sides act not in the best way."

In the 40-odd post-war years the two neighbouring countries have continually expanded and deepened their cooperation for the benefit of their peoples. Finland's foreign policy of peace has gone down in history as the "Paasikivi-Kekkonen line."

Such are the political lessons the statesmen and peoples of the two countries have learned from that ill-fated war.

But the war also taught many military lessons, especially to our country and its Armed Forces.

In his memoirs Nikita Khrushchev describes the outcome of the war in these words: "In those most favourable conditions we scored a victory in the war and achieved the goals we had set ourselves. But these victories showed our weakness and, consequently, we suffered a moral defeat. The country was not aware of this since it was not informed. Instead, 'May the victory thunder. . . '"

Khrushchev's assessment is not quite correct. Soviet propaganda had indeed lauded the actions of our forces. The press, especially the paper *Krasnaya Zvezda,* reported

mass-scale heroism by Soviet troops and the high level of Soviet military techniques. Whole newspaper pages were taken up by lists of men awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and combat decorations.

But among themselves the top military and political leaders took a sober-minded view of the experience and lessons of the war. A special plenary meeting of the Communist Party Central Committee in March 1940 discussed Voroshilov's report on the outcome of the war, which had just come to an end. In mid-April 1940 the Chief Military Council held an extended meeting with high-ranking army officers down to division commanders.

It was noted that in the course of the war the Red Army had gained experience in breaking through a strong fortified area in rigorous winter conditions, and that this experience would help to improve the Red Army's tactics and operational skills, its organizational structure and armaments, and troops control.

On the other hand, it was admitted that the war had cost human losses that could have been avoided, and proposals were made for dramatically improving armaments, organization and training. The rifle divisions had proved too cumbersome for the theatre, with unwieldy logistic services. There had been no ski units—they only began to be formed in the course of the war. The infantry could not fight on skis, and in this respect it was inferior to the Finnish troops. Serious problems had developed in army supplies, and the trucking service had proved inadequate. The commanders had insufficient knowledge of the enemy and his organization, armaments and tactics. They knew hardly anything about the dangers of the Mannerheim Line.

On the moral and political plane, the troops, especially the rank-and-file, did not understand the aims of the war, and political instruction officers had difficulty in explaining these aims.

The war was also analysed in letters addressed to Voroshilov from ex-combatants, who expressed their opinions about the actions both of the Soviet and the Finnish armies. Army Commander 2nd Rank Nikolai Voronov wrote that the Finnish troops had shown a high level of

individual tactical skill and marksmanship training. They were fine skiers and snipers, they often used flares to light the terrain, and were good at finding their way around. Their outfits were very well-designed. On the other hand, though they were good at defence, the Finns were poorly trained for offensive. Their main style of offensive action was small-group infiltration into the opponent's flanks and rear. The Finnish army had obsolete artillery and bad shortages of shells.

An analysis of the Red Army's performance in the Soviet-Finnish war was made in May 1940 when Marshal Timoshenko took over from Voroshilov as People's Commissar for Defence. It was stated that the Red Army commanders' concepts of war did not quite correspond to the modern reality. The general level of military education among the troops was low. Red Army officers and men were guided by such misconceptions as invincibility of the Red Army, its being an army of heroes, and the Soviet Union—a country of heroes and patriots. There was too much emphasis on the would-be technical superiority of the Red Army, while its internationalist objectives were not set out correctly. Other drawbacks listed included statements about the "love of man" and pacifism in our propaganda, as well as the fact that Soviet foreign policy was not correctly explained; and it was not sufficiently stated that any war waged by the Soviet Union was a just and progressive war. "We need to achieve such successes in our propaganda," the document said, "that the Red Army soldier does not stop to wonder why we are waging the war."

Referring to the Soviet-Finnish war, the document said: "There is a deeply ingrained and harmful preconceived idea that the populations of countries going to war with the Soviet Union are bound, down to the last man, to revolt and move over to the Red Army's side, and that workers and peasants will meet us with flowers. . . The war in Finland has shown that since we did not conduct political reconnaissance in the northern regions, we did not know with what slogans we should appeal to the people or how to work among them. In our propaganda we often addressed the Finnish peasants in the northern

regions as toilers, but it turned out that they were Skyddskár peasants—big-time kulaks. The clash with reality bewildered our men and commanders, who knew the populations of foreign countries only from stereotyped slogans and simplistic propaganda."

The lessons of the Soviet-Finnish war prompted the introduction of certain measures to improve the combat efficiency of Soviet troops. These measures were important on the eve of the war against Nazi Germany. Not all of them, however, had been implemented by June 1941.

Both in the course of the Soviet-Finnish war and after it the general staffs of Germany and Italy and their Western adversaries carefully studied the condition and actions of the Soviet forces. In their reports the military attaches of these countries unanimously pointed to the resilience of the Soviet troops, the high qualities of Soviet artillery, and the massive use of armour and artillery. But they were highly critical of the professional skills of Soviet commanders of all ranks, their ability to ensure coordination in battle, and stressed their lack of concern about the losses and the health of Red Army men. The ambassadors and military attaches spoke of the extremely low level of discipline in the Red Army. The German military attache said in his report that "Soviet soldiers have no idea whatsoever about discipline."

On the basis of these reports, the Western governments came to a far-reaching conclusion about the Soviet Union's overall weakness in the military field. Accordingly, London and Paris were inclined to dismiss the Soviet Union as a serious partner in potential talks about military cooperation.

On March 29, 1940, the Danish newspaper *Tidernes Tegn* stated in an article entitled "The Red Army's Secrets" that "the Finnish-Russian war has revealed more secrets about the Red Army than a successful intelligence agent would have learned in the 20 years of its existence." In Finland, said the author, the Red Army stood a real test, for it faced its first serious adversary, renowned for its best individual soldiers. The author mentioned the 44th Soviet division, which was destroyed by the Finns. The Finns seized some of the best Russian arms—anti-tank

guns, machine-guns and revolvers. The author spoke highly of the Soviet-made arms and equipment, which in his view testified to the abilities of Soviet designers.

Berlin also drew its conclusions. Hitler became convinced that the Soviet Union was a colossus on feet of clay, who could be easily defeated in a future confrontation. During the Soviet-Finnish war, in January 1940, the German envoy to Helsinki, von Blücher, sent the Foreign Ministry his analysis of the condition and actions of the Red Army. He said that for six weeks Finland had been like a guinea pig on which the quality of the Red Army and the military power of Bolshevism had been tested. In his opinion, the experiment indicated one thing: despite its supremacy in troops and equipment, the Red Army suffered one defeat after another, losing thousands of its men as prisoners along with hundreds of guns, tanks and aircraft, and failing to seize the crucial territory. The Kuusinen government had not evoked a positive response in the country and even the working class was opposed to it.

In the light of these facts, von Blücher called for reviewing the German concepts about Bolshevik Russia. We were wrong to think, he said, that Russia was a first-class military factor and that Bolshevism together with the Comintern had a strong influence on the working masses in other countries. In actual fact, the Red Army had so many flaws that it could not overpower even a small nation, and the Comintern failed to condition the Finnish people, 40 per cent of whom were organized in the socialist party.

From the standpoint of Russia's economic power, von Blücher continued, the Finnish experiment showed that for some time Russia had ceased to be a threat to such a great power as Germany and that Germany's rear was free in the east. So the gentlemen in the Kremlin could now be talked to in a perfectly different language from the one used in August and September 1939.

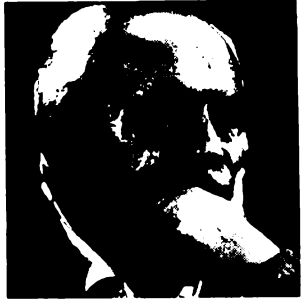
Von Blücher concluded that Russia's alliance with the Western powers was not on the agenda, since Russia had strongly compromised itself with its Finnish adventure and demonstrated its political and military weakness. He

suggested that a hard line be taken towards Moscow. . .

Long before the Second World War came to an end, President Roosevelt publicly called for it to be given a name. Later he and Churchill concluded that it should be called the unnecessary war. This would appear to be a misnomer, because that war was necessary: it accomplished a great mission—the destruction of fascism. The unnecessary war was the Soviet-Finnish war, which produced nothing but grief and suffering.

It reminded not only the Soviet Union and Finland but all other countries how important it is to show statesmanship, flexibility and prudence, and to weigh all the pros and cons before taking the plunge. As for the security of both countries, the best guarantee of this proved to be good-neighbourly relations based on mutual trust and respect. Our peoples should always remember this, particularly now when we are marking 50 years since that tragic occurrence in our history. Even half a century after the war, we cannot consider it a mere historical fact. Our duty is to tell the truth about the war and draw lessons from it which will help to promote good-neighbourly relations between our two countries and perfect the theory and practice of international relations as a whole.

In late October 1989, when Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and President of the USSR Supreme Soviet, paid a visit to Finland, its President, Mauno Koivisto, described the lessons of the Soviet-Finnish wars as follows: "The harsh wars have taught the Finnish people that a small nation should take into account the security interests of its great neighbour and avoid trying to build its future by counting on overseas aid and sympathies."



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